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IN THE CLAIMS:

Please AMEND claims 44, 47, 48, 50-52 and 55, as follows. For the Examiner's convenience, all claims currently pending in this application have been reproduced below:

1-41. (Cancelled)

42. (Previously Presented) An exposure processing system, comprising:

an exposure apparatus for exposing a wafer to a pattern on a reticle in a first atmosphere;

a reticle stocker having a sealing member having a first gate and a second gate, and an atmosphere controller for controlling an interior of the sealing member to a second atmosphere, for stocking the reticle in the second atmosphere;

a transfer path for transferring the reticle stocked by said reticle stocker from said reticle stocker to said exposure apparatus via said first gate and for transferring the reticle used by said exposure apparatus from said exposure apparatus to said reticle stocker via said first gate; and

a load-lock chamber for transferring a reticle, which is received from an exterior of said exposure processing system, to said reticle stocker via said second gate, after the reticle is received from the exterior of said exposure processing system and an atmosphere replacement is performed to change an exterior atmosphere to the second atmosphere.

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43. (Previously Presented) The system according to claim 42, wherein said transfer path has a second load-lock chamber for transferring the reticle stocked by said reticle stocker to said exposure apparatus, after the reticle is received from said reticle stocker and an atmosphere replacement is performed to change the second atmosphere to the first atmosphere.

44. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 42, wherein said exposure apparatus transfers the pattern on the reticle to the wafer using an F₂ excimer ~~laser~~, laser, and wherein an oxygen concentration of said the first atmosphere is equal to or less than 1 ppm and an oxygen concentration of said the second atmosphere is equal to or less than 50 ppm.

45. (Previously Presented) The system according to claim 42, wherein said atmosphere controller has evacuation means and inert gas injection means, and repeats alternatively an evacuation by said evacuation means and an inert gas injection by said inert gas injection means.

46. (Previously Presented) The system according to claim 42, further comprising confirmation means for confirming whether the reticle has been stocked in said reticle stocker for a predetermined time, when the reticle is transferred from said reticle stocker to said exposure apparatus.

47. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 42, wherein ~~said~~ the reticle is stored in a reticle box,

wherein said load-lock chamber performs atmosphere replacement to control an external atmosphere of said exposure processing system to the second atmosphere while said reticle box is opened, after the reticle stored in said reticle box is received from an exterior of said exposure processing system, and

wherein said transfer path transfers the reticle stored in said reticle box from said reticle stocker to said exposure apparatus while said reticle box is closed.

48. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 42, wherein ~~said~~ the reticle is stored in a reticle box,

wherein said reticle stocker stocks the reticle stored in said reticle box in said second atmosphere while said reticle box is opened, and

wherein said transfer path transfers the reticle stored in said reticle box from said reticle stocker to said exposure apparatus while said reticle box is closed.

49. (Cancelled)

50. (Currently Amended) A stocker for stocking a substrate covered with a substrate cover, said stocker comprising:

a sealing member, having a stocking station within, for storing the substrate covered with said substrate cover, on said stocking station;

a first atmosphere controller for controlling an interior of said substrate cover of the substrate stored by said stocking station, to a first atmosphere; and

a second atmosphere controller for controlling a space between an interior of said sealing member and an exterior of said substrate cover of said substrate stored on said stocking station, to a second atmosphere,

wherein an oxygen concentration of the second atmosphere is higher than an oxygen concentration of the first atmosphere and is lower than an oxygen concentration of an exterior of said sealing member.

51. (Currently Amended) An exposure processing system, comprising:

an exposure apparatus for performing an exposure process for a substrate covered with a substrate cover in a first atmosphere;

a substrate stocker having a sealing member, having a stocking station within, for storing ~~said~~ the substrate on said stocking station, and having an atmosphere controller for controlling an interior of said substrate cover of ~~said~~ the substrate stored on said stocking station to a second atmosphere and for controlling a space between an interior of said sealing member

and an exterior of said substrate cover of ~~said~~ the substrate stored on said stocking station to a third atmosphere; and

a transfer path for performing a transfer process for the substrate covered with said substrate cover between said exposure apparatus and said substrate stocker.

52. (Currently Amended) The system according to claim 51, wherein said exposure apparatus performs the exposure process using an F₂ excimer laser, and

wherein an oxygen concentration of ~~said~~ the first atmosphere is equal to or less than 1 ppm, an oxygen concentration of ~~said~~ the second atmosphere is equal to or less than 5 ppm and an oxygen concentration of ~~said~~ the third atmosphere is equal to or less than 50 ppm.

53. (Cancelled)

54. (Previously Presented) The stocker according to claim 50, wherein a control of said first atmosphere controller and a control of said second atmosphere controller are performed simultaneously.

55. (Currently Amended) The stocker according to claim 50, wherein ~~said~~ the substrate is used for an exposure process ~~using an F₂ excimer laser~~ in an atmosphere whose oxygen concentration is equal to or less than 1 ppm, and

wherein an oxygen concentration of ~~said~~ the first atmosphere is equal to or less than 5 ppm and an oxygen concentration of ~~said~~ the second atmosphere is equal to or less than 50 ppm.

56. (Previously Presented) A device manufacturing method comprising:

a step of performing an exposure process for a wafer using an exposure processing system having:

(i) an exposure apparatus for exposing a wafer to a pattern on a reticle in a first atmosphere;

(ii) a reticle stocker having a sealing member having a first gate and a second gate, and an atmosphere controller for controlling an interior of the sealing member to a second atmosphere, for stocking the reticle in the second atmosphere;

(iii) a transfer path for transferring the reticle stocked by the reticle stocker from the reticle stocker to the exposure apparatus via the first gate and for transferring the reticle used by the exposure apparatus from the exposure apparatus to the reticle stocker via the first gate; and

(iv) a load-lock chamber for transferring a reticle, which is received from an exterior of the exposure processing system, to the reticle stocker via the second gate, after the reticle is received from the exterior of the exposure processing system and an atmosphere replacement is performed to change an exterior atmosphere to the second atmosphere; and

a step of developing the wafer.

57. (Previously Presented) A device manufacturing method comprising:

a step of exposing a wafer to a pattern on a reticle using an exposure processing system having:

- (i) an exposure apparatus for performing an exposure process for a substrate, which is the wafer or the reticle, covered with a substrate cover in a first atmosphere;
 - (ii) a substrate stocker having a sealing member, having a stocking station within, for storing the substrate on the stocking station, and having an atmosphere controller for controlling an interior of the substrate cover of the substrate stored on the stocking station to a second atmosphere and for controlling a space between an interior of the sealing member and an exterior of the substrate cover of the substrate stored on the stocking station to a third atmosphere; and
 - (iii) a transfer path for performing a transfer process for the substrate covered with the substrate cover between the exposure apparatus, and the substrate stocker; and
- a step of developing the wafer.